



CIRCUS ASSIMILIS: Jard. & Selb.

CIRCUS ASSIMILIS, *Jard. and Selb.*

Allied Harrier.

Circus assimilis, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 51.
Swamp Hawk, of the Colonists.

THE *Circus assimilis* may be regarded as the commonest of the Harriers inhabiting New South Wales and South Australia; it also occurs, but in smaller numbers, in Van Diemen's Land. Another Harrier is rather abundantly dispersed over all the localities suitable to its existence in Western Australia, and it is just possible that they may prove to be mere varieties of each other; if such should be the case, the whole of the southern portion of the coast of Australia, from east to west, must be included within the range of its habitat; still, without further evidence in favour of this supposition, I should consider them to be distinct species; and if this opinion is well-founded, the two species will be found to inosculate in the latitude of Spencer's and St. Vincent's Gulfs, as, in the collections lately forwarded to me by Mr. Harvey of Port Lincoln, I found two or three individuals precisely identical with those from Swan River. In size the *Circus assimilis* is but little inferior to the Marsh Harrier (*Circus æruginosus*) of Europe, to which it offers a great resemblance in its habits and economy; being generally seen flying slowly and somewhat heavily near the surface of the ground, evincing a partiality to lagoons and marshy places, situations which offer it a greater variety and abundance of food than any other; the principal part of its food consists of reptiles, small mammalia and birds. I several times observed this species in the lagoons near Clarence Plains in Van Diemen's Land, as well as in all similar situations in almost every part of New South Wales I visited.

I was not so fortunate as to find the nest of this Harrier,—a knowledge of its form and of the colour of its eggs is therefore yet to be ascertained. That it breeds in the localities in which I observed it I have little doubt, from the circumstance of the adults paying regular and hourly visits to the marshes in search of food, which was doubtless borne away to their young. When in a state of quiescence, this species, like the other Harriers, perches on some elevation in the open plain rather than among the trees of the forest; the trunk of a fallen tree, a large stone, or small hillock, being among its favourite resting-places.

The sexes offer the usual differences in the larger size of the female; the markings of that sex are also rather less well-defined, and have not so much of the grey colouring as the male.

Head and all the upper surface rich dark brown; the feathers at the back of the neck margined with reddish buff; face light reddish brown; facial disc buffy white, with a dark stripe down the centre of each feather; all the under surface buffy white, which is deepest on the lower part of the abdomen and thighs, each feather with a streak of brown down the centre; upper tail-coverts and base of the tail-feathers white; remaining length of the tail-feathers brownish grey; irides reddish orange; eyelash and cere pale yellow; bill dark brown, becoming light blue at the base; tarsi greenish white; feet bright orange; claws dark brown.

The female differs in being of a larger size and of a darker brown, particularly on the under surface, and in having the tail of a deeper tint and obscurely barred.

The figures are about two-thirds of the natural size.